

# The reality of menopause weight gain

**Many women gain weight as they age, but extra pounds aren't inevitable. To help ease weight gain, step up your activity level and enjoy a healthy diet.**

[By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

As they get older, women may notice that staying at their usual weight becomes harder. It's common for weight gain to start a few years before menopause, during the time known as perimenopause. Weight gain often continues at about the rate of 1.5 pounds each year as a woman goes through her 50s.

Menopause weight gain is common. But you may be able to minimize it by paying attention to healthy eating habits and leading an active lifestyle.

## What causes menopause weight gain?

The hormonal changes of menopause tend to make it more likely that women will gain weight around the abdomen, rather than the hips and thighs. But hormonal changes alone don't necessarily cause the weight gain. Instead, it's usually related to aging, as well as lifestyle and genetic factors.

For example, muscle mass typically goes down with age, while fat increases. Losing muscle mass slows the rate at which the body uses calories. That rate is called metabolism. This process can make it more difficult to stay at a healthy weight. If you continue to eat as you always have and don't do more physical activity, you're likely to gain weight.

Most people become less active as they age. Paying attention to your activity and trying to move more may help keep you at a healthy weight.

Genetic factors also might play a role in weight gain around menopause. If your parents or other close relatives carry extra weight around the abdomen, you probably will too.

Other factors, such as eating a diet that isn't healthy and not getting enough sleep, might contribute to menopause weight gain. When people don't get enough sleep, they tend to snack more and eat and drink more calories.

## How risky is this weight gain?

Menopause weight gain can have serious effects on your health. Extra weight, especially around your midsection, increases your risk of many health issues, including:

- Breathing problems.
- Heart and blood vessel disease.
- Type 2 diabetes.

Extra weight also raises your risk of some kinds of cancer, including breast, colon and endometrial cancers.

## What's the best way to prevent menopause weight gain?

There's no magic formula for preventing — or reversing — menopause weight gain. But sticking to weight-control basics can help:

- **Move more.** Physical activity, including aerobic exercise and strength training, may help you lose extra pounds and stay at a healthy weight. As you gain muscle, your body burns calories better, which makes it easier to control your weight.

For most healthy adults, experts recommend moderate aerobic activity. This includes brisk walking for at least 150 to 200 minutes a week or vigorous aerobic activity, such as jogging, for at least 75 minutes a week.

In addition, strength training exercises are recommended at least twice a week. If you want to lose weight or meet specific fitness goals, you might need to exercise more.

Find time to take care of yourself. Activities that you enjoy doing can help you get exercise. This can include gardening, yoga or other active hobbies.

Moving more also may help you sleep better. That can make it easier to exercise more.

- **Eat less.** To keep your current weight, you might need about 200 fewer calories a day during your 50s than you did during your 30s and 40s. Losing weight might mean taking in even fewer calories.

To get fewer calories without skimping on nutrition, pay attention to what you're eating and drinking. Choose more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, especially those that are less processed and contain more fiber.

In general, a plant-based diet is healthier than other options. Legumes, nuts, soy, fish and low-fat dairy products are good choices. Eat meat in limited quantities. Eat fish and seafood instead of red meat. Replace butter, stick margarine and shortening with oils, such as olive or vegetable oil.

- **Check your sweet habit.** Added sugars account for nearly 300 calories a day in the average American diet. About half of these calories come from sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, juices, energy drinks, flavored waters, and sweetened coffee and tea.

Other foods that contribute to extra dietary sugar include cookies, pies, cakes, doughnuts, ice cream and candy.

- **Limit alcohol.** Alcoholic beverages add extra calories to your diet and raise the risk of gaining weight.
- **Seek support.** Surround yourself with friends and loved ones who support your efforts to eat a healthy diet and increase your physical activity. Better yet, team up and make the lifestyle changes together.

## **Does hormone therapy help to lessen weight gain?**

Hormone therapy usually is used to help with hot flashes that affect quality of life. This treatment also may help redistribute the fat that accumulates around the center of the body or abdomen. That type of fat is called visceral fat. And hormone therapy may help you manage your weight by improving sleep, which can lead to healthier lifestyle changes.

Remember, gaining weight during menopause is common. Embracing the changes to your body that come with menopause can help your mental health. But you may be able to ease weight gain by changing your diet and exercise habits. Commit to lifestyle changes and enjoy a healthier you.